

Exploring the Self-Concept and Sense of Belonging of Academically Accelerated Gifted Male Adolescents in a New Zealand Context

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Abstract

When it comes to provision for intellectually gifted students, acceleration – the introduction of curriculum early or at a faster rate than usual – is not a popular choice in New Zealand. This is despite overwhelming overseas research finding academic acceleration to be a very effective way of meeting the needs of gifted learners. Research has also identified that many parents and educators hold a common fear that accelerating children will negatively affect their social-emotional development. The current study aimed to explore the validity of this fear. A mixed-methods study with an explanatory-sequential design was used to explore the self-concepts and sense of belonging of a cohort of 30 male Year 13 students at a single-sex secondary school in New Zealand. The students were all dually-enrolled in a variety of 100-level courses through a local university. The participants completed the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale 2, with the results compared to the test norms; other than physical-self-concept, no significant differences were found between the norms and the cohort on the domains measured, with all scores within the "Normal" range. Five of the participants were then purposively selected for semi-structured interviews investigating self-concept and sense of belonging, and how their experiences in their school's acceleration programme may have impacted upon these. All of the interviewees expressed a strong sense of belonging to the school and the acceleration programme, and felt that the programme had enabled them to develop socially. The questionnaire and interview results indicated that the accelerated students felt comfortable in their identity as "accelerates", while also feeling accepted by their fellow students. These findings suggest acceleration classes to be a positive provision for gifted students that does not significantly impact their social-emotional development.

Keywords: acceleration, gifted, talented, self-concept, belonging, social-emotional

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“Ma whero ma pango ka oti ai te mahi” – Māori Proverb

“With red and black the work will be complete.”

I stumbled upon this proverb, and the message resonated with me. It speaks of the traditional colours of the marae, and how they come together to complete the kowhaiwhai pattern. This message of collaboration has been a treasured lesson I have learnt this year, as I would not have made it to this point without the assistance of others. I therefore take this time to thank the whero to my pango:

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	vii
Introduction	1
Giftedness in Aotearoa New Zealand	1
Providing Effective Support for Gifted and Talented Students	2
Acceleration in Aotearoa New Zealand	3
The Academic Effectiveness of Acceleration	4
Why is Acceleration Unpopular?	7
Where Are We Now?	9
Literature Review	11
Self-Concept Defined	11
Self-Concept, Age, and Gender	13
Effects of Self-Concept	15
Self-Concept of Accelerated Students	16
Self-Concept and Sense of Belonging	23
Sense of Belonging Defined	25
Sense of Belonging to School	27
Sense of Belonging of Accelerated Students	29
Limitations of the Current Literature	29
Methodology	32
Research Design	32

Methods.....	35
Participants	37
Analysis	39
Ethics	40
My Perspective	41
Summary.....	42
Results	43
Questionnaire Results.....	43
Interview Results	47
<i>Banter</i>	47
<i>Uniqueness</i>	48
<i>Explaining “average” self-concept</i>	49
<i>Adequacy of the Piers-Harris 2</i>	50
<i>Defining self-concept</i>	51
<i>Enablers to belonging</i>	52
<i>Barriers to belonging</i>	53
<i>Belonging and acceleration</i>	54
<i>Associating with non-accelerates</i>	55
<i>Belonging in extracurricular groups</i>	56
<i>Experience in non-accelerated classes</i>	57
<i>Feeling separate</i>	59
Summary.....	61

Discussion	63
Non-Academic Self-Concept	63
Academic Self-Concept	65
Sense of Belonging	66
Interaction with Non-Accelerates	67
Positively Unique	69
Banter and the BFLPE	70
Limitations	73
Implications and Recommendations	77
Conclusions	82
References	83
Appendices	103
Appendix A: Pre-planned interview questions	103
Appendix B: Research information form for participants	105

List of Tables

Table 1: Total number and percentage of participants enrolled in relevant 100-level university courses for each subjects	38
Table 2: Cohort mean scores, standard deviations, and descriptors for each scale of the Piers-Harris 2, and age-equivalent norm population mean scores for each scale.....	44
Table 3: Output <i>t</i> -scores and Hedge's <i>g</i> values from analysis of differences between mean scores of participants and age-equivalent norms on all scales of the Piers-Harris 2	46
Table 4: Integration of quantitative statistical data and themes from the qualitative interview data	61